

Storms

A Stormy History

By TONY KELSO

Duxbury dodged another hurricane this past week, but for centuries we have been in the path of many a fierce storm.

One of the earliest observed hurricanes occurred in late August 1635.

Governor William Bradford wrote that it started early in the morning and came on with great violence, "to the great amazement of many." It blew down houses, ships were lost

at sea and in some places the tidal surge was 20 feet above normal, causing the local natives to climb into trees for safety. "Many hundreds of thousands" of trees were uprooted and knocked down, with the hurricane lasting about six hours in this area. Southeast facing coastlines got the worst, and "the signs and marks will remain this hundred years." Although this storm occurred two years before Duxbury was officially recognized as a town, those first Duxbury families also suffered hardships the following winter because much of their crops were destroyed just before harvest.

Eighteenth century storms that affected south-eastern Massachusetts occurred with regularity in 1703, 1716, 1727, 1743, 1761, 1770 and 1783. These hurricanes of September and early October were also known to damage south fac-

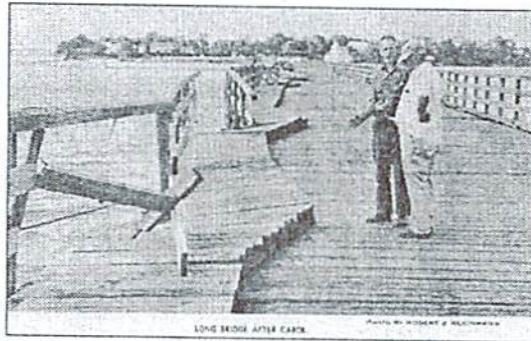
ing coast lines such as Powder Point and Captain's Hill. The storm of 1727 was particularly fierce with the eye passing over Plymouth County. Yet a rainbow appeared after, that many took as a token "that the waters shall no more become a flood."

Unfortunately no Duxbury accounts of these storms survive.

The great September 23 storm of 1815 was well remembered in this area, particularly with tidal surges that funneled up bays like Narragansett and Buzzard's. The sandy areas of the Myles Standish cellar hole and Duxbury beach were hard hit as the storm arrived at about high tide.

Duxbury Clipper

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Photos courtesy of Ann Noyes

There were lesser hurricanes later in that century, but another large one in this area occurred in September 1869. This was only a few months after the French Atlantic cable was landed on Duxbury Beach and brought ashore. Luckily, not much damage was done to the cable.

Twentieth century Duxbury has had its share of major hurricanes. A storm largely forgotten around here now, was a hurricane on August 26, 1924. Mallison Randall left a reminiscence about the storm that stated areas like Josselyn Ave, Lover's Lane, and the old Cove area were under a half foot of water. The storm lasted all day with the heaviest winds gusts being about 75 miles an hour. "I could almost lean against it," Randall remembered. Trees, chimneys, telephone and electric wires were downed, but by night the skies were clear, and hundreds of people went out to Duxbury Beach to watch the surf.

Many long time Duxbury residents remember the hurricanes of 1938 and 1944.

The famous 1938 hurricane was bad here, but could have been worse. It occurred late in September, so most of the boats in the harbor were out for the season, since they were owned by summer residents who were not in Duxbury by that time. The southeast winds shifted to the southwest giving better protection to Snug Harbor and the height of the storm also occurred

at low tide here.

The August hurricane of 1944 was much more destructive in Duxbury in terms of loss of boats. The shore areas were littered with smashed and splintered pleasure craft of all sorts.

1954 was the year well remembered in Duxbury for two September hurricanes, Carol and Edna, which slammed this area within twelve days of each other. The early *Duxbury Clippers* well chronicle these storms.

Carol arrived unexpectedly, with peak winds clocked at about 90 miles an hour. Its height was reached about two hours before high tide, but even so many boats were ripped from their moorings or sunk and 15 foot waves pounded areas like King Caesar Road. Twenty people had to be rescued off Duxbury Beach and a Coast and Geodetic Survey boat slammed into Powder Point Beach, causing extensive damage to the structure. The beach also had many of its dunes flattened.

Trees were down all over town, especially the old elms weakened by Dutch elm disease and damaged in the earlier hurricanes. West Duxbury and Mayflower cemetery suffered damage to trees "too great to estimate." Power outages were lengthy, particularly in neighborhoods like Ashdod.

When hurricane Edna arrived soon after Carol, the damage was less than expected, despite the barometric pres-

sure being much lower. The eye of the hurricane passed to the east, so the winds were not so violent. Any boats not ruined by Carol, were either pulled or sheltered in protected areas like Bluefish River. A large elm fell across

Bay Road near Miramar and blocked that road for three days. One of the worst hit areas was the south side of Captain's Hill, with the Standish Monument Reservation losing many pine trees that snapped off in the middle.

Hurricane Donna arrived in Duxbury on September 12 1960, shortly after high tide with wind gusts clocked at least 70 miles per hour. The worst damage happened in a short time around 6:30 pm with boats unexpected ripped from their moorings and then sunk by violent wind gusts. Trees were down in many areas, with the worst hit area again being the south side of Captain's Hill around the Myles Standish monument. Duxbury Beach survived with only a small amount of damage. Power was about for about a day in Duxbury. Hornets, flies, chipmunks and squirrels were homeless and became nuisances after the storm passed. The Unitarian church received a large hole in roof, prompting one member to quip, "One of my Baptist friends just told me that at last the Unitarians see the light."

In recent memory, hurricanes Gloria in 1985, and Bob in 1991, caused tree damage and extensive power outages all over Duxbury, but physical damages was kept to a minimum. This result was thanks to better hurricane warnings by national and local authorities, and the long range projections that have developed since the early 1960s. Duxbury's famous low tides and mudflats

also helped to protect the shoreline during these storms.

In looking back on this role call of hurricanes over the last centuries that have affected Duxbury, it is clear to see that despite the fierceness of the storm and the damage that can occur, Duxbury and its residents can weather most any hurricane.
